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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004980

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SUBJECT: IRAQI NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR DISCUSSES NEXT
GOVERNMENT, ELECTION OUTCOMES

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ZALMAY KHALILZAD FOR REASONS
1.4 (a), (b), (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: At a private luncheon hosted by the Ambassador at his residence on December 9, Iraqi National Security Advisor Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie shared his concerns about USG plans for the future of Iraq, urged the Ambassador to play an active role in assuring the "right" people are chosen to form the next government, made predictions about the outcome of the national election to be held on December 15, and agreed with the Ambassador's suggestion that Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani urge other leaders to join him in agreeing to a "National Pact" of ten or fifteen non-political pronouncements common to all factions in the country. The Ambassador assured Rubaie that the USG is not planning behind the backs of the Iraqis for the future of this country. Rubaie and the Ambassador discussed the proper mix of "political" vs. "technocrat" ministerial appointments for the next government, agreeing that it is critical that the new government be formed of competent individuals who will rise above party or sectarian imperatives to put the interests of the nation first. Rubaie predicted that a new government will not be formed until mid-April, to which the Ambassador replied that the Iraqis will have to do much better than that. Rubaie believes that former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi damaged his election prospects with an ill-conceived and poorly timed visit to Najaf, which ended in an embarrassing and dangerous melee. He predicted Allawi's party will be lucky to win 20 seats. He believes the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) will be the beneficiary of Allawi's loss and will garner 120 to perhaps more than 130 seats in the new assembly.
END SUMMARY.

PLANNING WITHOUT US?

12. (C) Rubaie told the Ambassador that he is concerned because he has heard that there are various committees in the Embassy that are making plans, revising the strategy for the future of Iraq. Ambassador replied that there is no talk of "revising" strategy but that various groups in the Embassy are constantly planning the way ahead. He briefed Rubaie on work dealing with the coming transition. Three principles govern our approach to the transition: the next government must be formed more quickly than the last one; the new government must be diverse in its composition and must be effective, made up not just of politicians but also of competent people with the experience and managerial ability to run their ministries (particularly the key ministries); and steps must be taken to assure the new government has a good "launch" by achieving tangible and positive results in the first one hundred days. "Isn't this something you should do in cooperation with us?" asked Rubaie. "Most definitely," replied the Ambassador, "But at this stage it is only brainstorming, and our Iraqi colleagues are reoccupied with campaigning for the election. Once the election is over we will definitely work together on these issues."

13. (C) The Ambassador also described to Rubaie the work being done at the Embassy in cooperation with the British on Sunni outreach. We are considering with whom we should be engaging, what really matters to the Sunnis, what can reasonably be offered to them, and in what sequence we should engage our interlocutors on these issues. Rubaie said this sounded more like what he had heard about, as it involves reaching out to the insurgency. He asked no further questions about this initiative.

THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT GOVERNMENT

14. (C) Rubaie said he sees the composition of the next government as an essential issue for the USG, and he urged the Ambassador to take an active role in

determining who the next ministers will be. Speaking of the period directly following the return of sovereignty, Rubaie complained that the Embassy took a hands-off attitude about the decisions made by the Iraqi government in the name of not impinging upon Iraqi sovereignty. It is not enough, Rubaie urged, for the Embassy to take a traditional diplomatic "observe and report" stance. Rather, the Embassy must protect the interests of the USG by assuring the next government will be an effective one that can consolidate the gains made to date and continue to move forward with even more effectiveness. The Ambassador agreed and said that his approach has always been to act as a facilitator but not impose ideas or solutions upon the Iraqis. Rubaie said this was entirely appropriate.

15. (C) Rubaie warned that many people want the new government to be in the same image as the current one -- that is, ministries divided along sectarian party lines. The election victors will want to pick "political" ministers. He recommended that the Ambassador press for the appointment of "technocrat" ministers, assuring that the key ministries are given to people with the knowledge, skills, and aptitude to succeed. Most importantly, the prime minister must be a competent, efficient individual who will be a strong leader committed to continued close consultation with the USG. Rubaie believes that, if the next government is similar to the current one, it will not be able to make clear decisions and will be brought down by the end of next year. The Ambassador agreed that it is imperative that the key ministers have the technical competence required to run their ministries. Rubaie urged that the U.S. not limit its focus to the appointment of ministers but that we also exercise a "veto power" over top tier officials in key ministries who have the power to wield considerable unchecked authority. Rubaie predicted it will take until mid-April for the new government to be formed. Ambassador replied that the Iraqis would have to do much better than that or critical momentum will be lost.

ELECTION PREDICTIONS

16. (C) Ambassador asked Rubaie if he had any elections predictions. Rubaie said he thinks that the two main contenders for Prime Minister will be Prime Minister Ja'afari and Vice President Adil Abdel-Mahdi but that both will be weakened by the struggle to gain the top spot and a compromise candidate (read Rubaie himself) will emerge and be victorious. No one believes Ja'afari is competent enough to continue as Prime Minister, but he will fight for it tooth and nail. On the other hand, Adil is not much of a fighter and could concede early, Rubaie opined. On the distribution of seats in the assembly, Rubaie said that last week he would have predicted the UIA would win 100 to 120 seats. Now he believes they will garner at least 120 and maybe even more than 130. There are two reasons for this shift. First, Sistani has told his deputies that he supports the UIA; so, although he will not lend an official or public endorsement, his people will be working to steer the vote to the UIA. Second, Rubaie believes that former prime minister Ayad Allawi's disastrous trip to the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf, where he was forced to flee, shoeless, by an angry and unruly mob, will cost him votes. Allawi is calling the attack on him an assassination attempt, but no one believes him, Rubaie asserted, and this has cost him credibility points with the voters. He will now be lucky to get 20 seats, and he will need at least 30 to assure himself a Vice Presidency. His loss will be Deputy Prime Minister Chalabi's gain. Rubaie fears that, if Allawi wins fewer than 20 seats, he will retire from politics, and this would be a loss for Iraq. Rubaie believes that the Kurdish vote is the easiest to predict, while Allawi's is the most difficult. The Iranians also will play a decisive roll behind the scenes to affect the outcome of the election.

A NATIONAL PACT

17. (C) Ambassador sounded Rubaie on his views of trying to get Sistani to call for or broker a "national pact," whereby an intersectarian group of Iraqi leaders would promulgate ten or fifteen general, non-political principles upon which all Iraqis can agree. The Ambassador told Rubaie that this will be a tough election, and the struggles that will ensue as

the government is formed also could lead to frayed relationships. Something will need to be done to bring the people back together, and there is no one better than Sistani, who is a "father of the nation" figure, to promote a reconciliation. Rubaie agreed that this would be a good idea and agreed to float it to Sistani. Rubaie, who has played a role as a key Embassy interlocutor with Sistani, asked the Ambassador if he'd had any direct contact with Sistani or was communicating with him through other sources. The Ambassador assured Rubaie that we only communicate with Sistani through him.

COMMENT

18. (C) Rubaie clearly wishes to reinforce his relationship with the Embassy and is maneuvering to assure he will retain a position of influence in the new government. He harbors illusions that perhaps he will be the "compromise candidate" who emerges as the next Prime Minister and clearly sees himself as one of the competent, efficient "technocrats" most qualified to lead a key ministry. As a result, he's trying to assure himself that the Embassy will push for him to fill a key position over other hopefuls who are more politically well-connected. Rubaie also fears that perhaps he is beginning to be marginalized by the Embassy. Hence his concerns that we are plotting strategy for Iraq without talking to him or dealing directly with Sistani when, in the past, he has been our principal interlocutor with this key religious figure. END COMMENT

KHALILZAD